

Silverman Sentinel

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Photo by Corey Lewis

Silverman helps paint homes as part of Rebuilding Together, a volunteer organization preserving and revitalizing low-income housing

A Place to Call Home

“When a family earning \$100,000 a year can’t afford to live in Montgomery County, something is wrong.” *Washington Post, Close to Home, October 24, 2004*

My comments in a recent *Washington Post* column sum up our County’s crisis in housing. With prices in the stratosphere, virtually every Montgomery County resident has an all too personal experience with our housing crisis. Just one fact: a median income family making around \$80,000 likely could not afford to buy a median priced new townhome, could not afford to buy a median priced “previously-owned” single-family detached home, and certainly could not afford to buy a new single-family detached home, currently going for more than \$500,000.

The Council’s Housing Committee, which I chair, has rolled up its sleeves to tackle revisions to our nationally recognized Moderately Priced Dwelling Unit program (MPDU). Councilmember Nancy Floreen and I have proposed several changes:

- keep MPDUs available to moderate income families for a longer period of time,
- end almost all instances in which a developer can pay a fee instead of building the required number of affordable apartments or homes, and
- permit our Planning Board to approve some modest flexibility in land use requirements such as height and density limits so that MPDUs will be included within high-rise apartment buildings and other housing developments. This could mean that an apartment building in Bethesda or Silver Spring might have one or two more floors than would otherwise be the case, but I believe this is an appropriate means to get affordable housing for people with moderate incomes who serve and work in our County.

Full Council action on these and other MPDU proposals is expected before our December recess. Stay tuned!

See below for the full text of my *Washington Post* column on a housing agenda for our County:

Middle Class and Priced Out of Montgomery

Sunday, October 24, 2004, *Washington Post*, *Close to Home*

When a family earning \$100,000 a year can't afford to live in Montgomery County, something is wrong.

In the White Oak area of Silver Spring, I recently drove past a development of new, three-bedroom townhouses. Three months ago, when these townhouses first went on the market, the asking price was a whopping \$480,000; now it is \$560,000.

A few families are lucky enough to be eligible for one of the project's "affordable" units, which have a price tied to the salary of a starting teacher. Everyone else, though, is out of luck, including families that may earn just a little more than \$55,000, the eligibility cutoff for the County's affordable units.

Montgomery's teachers, police officers, firefighters and bus drivers, along with thousands of private-sector employees, need to have a realistic chance to live in the County where they work. Otherwise, they will be forced to live elsewhere.

The median price of a new, single-family detached home in Montgomery County is now more than \$500,000; the median price for an older home is close to \$400,000. The Montgomery County Council needs to roll up its collective sleeves and work on this problem.

In the coming months the Council plans to tackle revisions to its moderately priced dwelling unit program, which requires builders to include affordable units along with their market-rate offerings. But the Council also must expand its

efforts to support housing for middle-class families. Its plan should:

- Use County-owned land. The cost of land in Montgomery is a huge factor in housing prices. That's why the County has identified 10 County-owned properties where it may be possible to work with private and nonprofit builders to develop new housing costing less than \$300,000.
- Maximize affordable units in high-rise, down-county areas and around Metro stations by allowing modest flexibility in height and open-space restrictions. Smart-growth areas should not be only for luxury condos and apartments.
- Make it easier for homeowners to rent small apartments in their homes, such as in-law suites, while balancing community concerns about parking and schools. This not only would provide housing for working people, it would in many cases give older residents the additional income they need to afford to stay in their own homes.
- Hold the federal government to its financial commitment. The federal government has changed the Housing Choice Voucher Program, giving the County even less money to help families keep a roof over their heads.
- Bolster rental assistance for working families. The County's waiting list for a helping hand has tripled since January. The County needs to do more.

Absent a can-do agenda on affordable housing, Montgomery County soon will be hanging out

signs that read "No Middle- and Lower-Income People Need Apply." We can't afford to let that

happen.

— *Steven Silverman is President of the Montgomery County Council and chairs its Housing Committee*

Support for Small Business

I am proud to sponsor legislation which creates a Local Small Business Reserve Program in Montgomery County, along with Councilmembers Floreen, Leventhal, and Perez.

This legislation, modeled after a new State law, requires that at least 10 percent of the total dollar value of local government contracts be awarded to Montgomery County-based small businesses. It also requires individual County government departments to post small procurement opportunities (\$1,000-\$25,000) on the Internet.

Small businesses are the backbone of this County and they deserve a fair chance to do business with County government. Often, our local small businesses, many of whom are minority and women-owned, are at a competitive disadvantage when bidding on County contracts.

A Council committee review of the bill is tentatively scheduled for November 23.

Montgomery County small businesses are critical to our County's economic future, and I am very pleased to take these steps to help widen opportunities for them.

Silverman Out and About



What do **Lance Armstrong** and **SpongeBob SquarePants** have in common? Lucky for me, I was able to shake hands with both of them! I was thrilled to be able to present a County proclamation honoring the Tour of Hope, the cross country bicycle tour led by Lance Armstrong in support of cancer clinical trials. Almost one

thousand area cyclists joined cycling legend Armstrong on the final leg of the tour, which ran through Montgomery County and ended on the Ellipse.



On that same weekend, at the Comcast Toon Day festival on the grounds of Strathmore Hall, I joined thousands of cartoon fans, (not all of whom were under the age of 10!) in welcoming SpongeBob and other Nickelodean cartoon characters!

Please join me at one of my upcoming Town Hall meetings:

Nov. 29 from 7:45 – 9:00 p.m. with Councilmember Knapp at the Upcounty Regional Services Center

Nov. 30 from 7:30 – 9:00 p.m. with Maryland District 16 Representatives at the Bethesda Regional Services Center

Dec. 1 from 7:30 – 9:00 p.m. with Maryland District 17 Representatives at the Council Office Building

Quote of the Day

In honor of the World Series Champion Boston Red Sox (finally after 86 years!) —

“More than any other sport, baseball creates the magnetic, addictive illusion that it can almost be understood.”

Thomas Boswell, in Inside Sports

If you wish to get in touch with me or to unsubscribe to this newsletter, please contact councilmember.silverman@montgomerycountymd.gov